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SUBJECT: WORRIES ABOUT SECURITY, NOT ABOUT STABILITY

REF: LAGOS 637

COUNSELOR JAMES MAXSTADT FOR REASONS 1.5 b AND d.

11. (C) SUMMARY: Several press reports indicate that Nigerian security agencies are becoming increasingly worried about the potential of the opposition groups to create trouble on the streets, specifically a group of opposition politicians called the Coalition of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP), and factions of street thugs collectively referred to as the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC). There are unconfirmed reports that the Government may soon clamp down on both by arresting leaders or restricting their movements. END SUMMARY.

CNPP

12. (U) Presidential Spokesman Remi Oyo described anyone participating in a proposed May 3 protest against President Obasanjo as an "enemy of the State." The CNPP is organizing the protest with cooperation from many prominent members of political parties, unions, civil society and the largest ethnic interest groups in the country. Mrs. Oyo added, "Anyone who seeks to heat the system now should be regarded as an enemy." This statement came amidst several attempts by the Nigerian security agencies to stop the proposed mass action. The CNPP put off its original date for the protest from the anniversary of Obasanjo's election to May 3 because it was too difficult to coordinate. Several meetings between GON security officials and CNPP figures have been reported, but the CNPP has not given up. ANPP and APGA 2003 presidential candidates Buhari and Ojukwu, and many other opposition activists and politicians, promise to lead the CNPP march in Abuja.

13. (C) Gani Fawehinmi, the famous Lagos-based lawyer, human rights activist and 2003 Presidential Candidate of the National Conscience Party (NCP), claims GON security forces are especially focusing on him. (COMMENT: Fawehinmi is a severe critic of all Nigerian governments. He has been jailed several times by past military administrations. In addition to opposing Obasanjo now, he is the lawyer for Orji Kalu -- a sitting PDP Governor widely seen as a political enemy of Obasanjo -- in a suit against Obasanjo ally Tony Anenih. Fawehinmi is lending his personal support for the CNPP mass action, although he has stated publicly that his party will not participate. The PDP has tried to portray the Nigerian opposition as ethnic zealots mostly coming from the Northern and, to a limited extent, Eastern parts of Nigeria, even though Fawehinmi is a Yoruba from the southwest. END COMMENT.)

14. (U) Notwithstanding the Presidency's strong public and private opposition to the CNPP march, ruling PDP party chairman Audu Ogbeh is reported in the newspapers as having expressed support for the CNPP's holding a demonstration. "It is the right of everyone in a democracy," Ogbeh told newsmen in Abuja on 20 April. He claimed that the PDP would organize its own counter-demonstration "after the CNPP finishes its own."

OPC

15. (U) Although not a part of the CNPP, the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) is also drawing the ire of GON security forces. Twenty six OPC members were arrested in Lagos after a bloody clash April 19 between the police and elements of the group. According to sources, the clash was sparked when police in Mushin area received a report of some OPC members molesting a commercial sex worker.

16. (U) Attempts to arrest the accused by the plain-clothes security personnel sent to Ijeshadato, a Lagos suburb, were resisted by OPC members. Fighting spread to other Lagos locales resulting in deaths and several injuries to police officers, OPC fighters and bystanders. The Lagos Police Commissioner was forced to dispatch reinforcements, including anti-riot police, to contain the violence.

COMMENT

17. (C) Incidents of violence around the country are creating a tense atmosphere in Nigeria, made more tense by the recent arrests of military officers and speculation on a coup attempt. With Obasanjo's opponents seeking avenues to express themselves, the combination of high tension and many thugs available for hire make it more likely that otherwise

peaceful actions could turn into violence.
ROBERTS